

Coyote Team: Beginnings

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Summary: They weren't supposed to be alive. Yet here they are, six SPARTAN-IIIs with one task:hurt the Insurrection in anyway possible. (This story contains select characters from the Halo universe, however they do not play a main role. Enjoy!)

1. Prologue

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**I do not own Halo or any of the related media. Enjoy!

>

UNSC

COYOTE TEAM:

ROB-098: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

DREW-059: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

GWEN-143: Spartan super-soldier (Female human)

GRANT-094: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

CARL-139: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

DAN-002: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

CPT. LYN MOWSEN: Captain, Dark of the Moon (Female human)

NYLA: Executive officer, Dark of the Moon (Female AI)

LT. COL. FRANK GILBO: Commander, 5th ODST (Male human)

PFC JON GRISO: Communications officer, Dark of the Moon (Male

human)

DR. CATHERINE HALSEY: Scientist (Female human)

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER MENDEZ: Spartan trainer (Male human)

MASTER CHIEF (JOHN-117): Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

JAKE-B034: Spartan super-soldier (Male human)

PROLOGUE

"Are you sure you want to go through with this, ma'am?" the burly officer asked,

"I am," the young woman replied,

"What if their connection disrupts your plans?" the officer continued,

"They will have no knowledge of their connection," the woman said insistently.

Still not ready to admit defeat, the officer took another look at the file and sighed.

"Are we sure that they are the only option?" he asked, "Isn't there another candidate somewhere we could swap out?"

The young woman took the file and scrolled through it.

"We do not have the time to retrieve another," she replied solemnly, "I have barely enough to retrieve the remaining fixed candidates before we must begin training to stay on schedule."

The officer stared at the floor for a while and when his face came back up, it seemed to have another line etched across it.

"Where are they?" he asked, "Harvest, Arcadia, Harmony?"

The woman shook her head,

"Reach," she replied.

The officer stood up and straightened his jacket,

"Then to Reach we shall go," he said confidently. The woman nodded and stood as well. She gathered her things and headed for the door.

"Dr. Halsey," the officer said sternly. The woman stopped.

"I hope this all goes well," the officer continued.

Dr. Halsey stood in silence for a brief second, then continued out the door,

"As do I, Lieutenant Keyes."

2. Chapter 1

"Move it, move it, move it!" the huge man yelled. He waved his electric prod, making the air crackle. Drew, young SPARTAN candidate, flinched from the sound and forced his legs to pump faster. His friend Rob, who was a year older, huffed and puffed at his side. It was easy to see that he was tiring fast, just like Drew. The trainers had extended the already strenuous morning run by an additional half a kilometer and Drew's last reserves of energy were fading fast.

Two candidates ahead of Drew, the young girl named Gwen was trotting along at a steady pace, head held high, as if the extra half a k' meant nothing at all to her ferocious running ability.

"Show off," Drew muttered as the group approached the end of the run.

"What?" Rob asked, his cheeks puffed out with exertion. Drew slowed and stopped as he passed the jury-rigged finish line. The instructor, Chief Petty Officer Mendez, told them to fall out and take a five minute break before breakfast. Drew grabbed his canteen off the table and barely resisted the temptation to guzzle it dry. He knew from past experience that if he drained the contents, he would be seeing them again in less than an hour. Instead he took small sips until he was satisfied.

"Who's a show-off?" Rob asked again. Drew looked at him in confusion for a brief moment, then remembered,

"Oh, Gwen," Drew replied, "I know she is a good runner, but she doesn't need to rub it in by acting like that extra half k' was no surprise."

Rob glanced over at Gwen as he took another swig from his canteen. She was standing over with a group of friends, chatting as they waited for Chief Mendez to call them in.

"I mean look at her," Drew remarked, "She took all of one sip and put it down."

"I heard she won contests around here," Rob said, wiping droplets of water off his chin.

"She's from here?" Drew asked, "Reach?"

"Yep," Rob replied, "New Alexandria."

Drew felt like that answer should mean something to him. Something tugged at the back of his mind, like a long ago memory, but there was a big gaping hole in his mind and he couldn't put his finger on it.

"How did you know?" he asked Rob, "Did she tell anyone?"

"Nope," Rob replied, "She was talking about competing in kids running competitions and someone recognized her accent."

"At five years old?" Drew asked quizzically.

"Yep," Rob replied.

Drew wanted to ask more questions, but suddenly Chief Mendez was telling them to get in line for chow. Drew's spirits rose. Meal time was the best part of the day, especially on days like today. Usually the meal was only tasteless gruel that Drew couldn't identify, but sometimes, usually once a week on Sunday, they were given a piece of pie or an apple to add some color to the otherwise gray palette. Drew took a place ahead of Rob and waited for the Chief to let them in. To his dismay he found himself behind Gwen. She was always ahead of him in running; did she have to be ahead of him in everything else, too? He wanted to pout over it some more, but then Chief Mendez Called to them to march into the mess hall. Drew grabbed his tray, delightfully anticipating the taste of the bright green pear sitting on top of it, and headed for him and Rob's usual table. They had met here 6 years ago during their first day of training. At the time, Drew had still been a terrified, confused 5 year-old, scared to death of the burly drill sergeants with their painful electric prods, but defiant that he would be able to face his fear. Eventually he had gotten to the point where the trainers no longer gave him the urge to curl up on the ground and cry. A key component of this strengthening was Rob, who had recognized the plight of the little five-year old who sat next to him that first day. For the past 6 years, even though he was only a year older, he had been a role model and a helper to Drew.

Drew was now eleven years old and Rob was twelve. They had been training hard and had even gotten to look forward to some of the PT events, especially the maze. But still, at the end of the day, the time spent with Rob at their table in the mess hall, the only time when they could have a real conversation, was Drew's favorite time of all. It was there that they could joke about PT without drawing the wrath of the trainers. They could also compare opinions about the food and the training. But most important, it was a place where it was just him and Rob, one on one; usually because everybody else thought they were weird and sat at a different table.

Just then Rob came over. He had gotten stuck in the line for some reason and hurtled into his food like eating was going out of style. Drew was about to ask him more about Gwen's past when a voice came over the loudspeaker.

"All candidates report to the assembly hall," the voice commanded,
"Repeat, all candidates report to the assembly hall."

Even though Drew was only half finished, one of the first things he had learned here was that the trainers didn't take kindly to finishing your meal when you had a place to be. Drew joined Rob in the march towards the assembly hall. When they arrived, they took the same seats they had taken for the past six years. Suddenly the school's AI, DÃ©jÃ , blossomed into view at center stage, her blue form shimmering as she raised her hands for quiet.

"Attention, candidates," she said elegantly, "Chief Petty Officer Mendez has decided that it is time for you to begin a new stage of your training." An excited murmuring swept through the assembled candidates and DÃ©jÃ once again had to raise her arms for quiet.

"I know what you are thinking, and it is correct," she said,
"Tomorrow you will begin advanced combat training through wargames."

More murmurings swept through the crowd.

"Your opponents in these wargames will be Tango Company of the UNSC," Dā©jā announced. A few shocked murmurings ran through the crowd, for Tango Company was well known.

"To prepare for these wargames, you will all be split up into six candidate teams, based on previous experience." Dā©jā said, expecting the silence that came afterwards, "This will help to simulate an actual combat environment."

Drew was stunned. This couldn't be happening. The thought of losing Rob to some other team was unbearable. He had already lost his family, now he was most likely going to lose the only friend he had ever had here. He wanted to jump up and scream that it wasn't fair, but Dā©jā wasn't finished.

"Your new teams and barracks assignments will be posted on your bunks tonight," she announced, "Dismissed."

Drew walked out of the assembly hall filled with shock and anger. He wanted to grab an MA5 and put a few more entry ports in Dā©jā's computer, but he knew that was wrong. Instead he threw his anger into his training. He cleared the maze in record time, so fast that his own team had a lot of trouble keeping up and he even beat John-117, the Spartan that almost always won. Drew trained so hard that at the end of the day he could barely read the piece of paper taped to his bunk. It read:

COYOTE TEAM

Barracks room A-29

So, Coyote Team it was then. Drew liked the name and the team's emblem, which was posted under the name, so much that he found himself actually eager to meet his new teammates. He walked down the hall until he reached the room that had a big "A-29" posted on the door. He walked in and was initially filled with joy at the sight of Rob. But then he saw the rest of the squad and his heart sank into his boots. Sitting on the lower bunk right in front of him was Gwen. On her right was Carl, a young Spartan that he had seen often excelling in the close quarters combat drills. Next to him was Grant, a quiet Spartan who you never seemed to see until he was right in front of you. Sitting on top of one of the bunks was Dan, an outspoken Spartan who loved it when things went boom. Drew had met them all, minus Gwen, during the ride to the Wilderness Training Course, when the Spartans had teamed up under the leadership of John-117. They were all pretty cool, but the sight of Gwen made everything else that was good about his team null and void. Everyone stopped talking and stared as he locked eyes with Gwen.

"Hey Drew," Rob said happily, trying to break the silence.

"Hey," Drew replied, his eyes still locked with Gwen's.

They stayed locked for almost a full minute until suddenly Drew remembered how tired he was and broke the lock. Was it just him, or did Gwen smirk a little? With the breaking of the eye lock, everybody resumed their activities. Grant climbed into a bunk, put his hands behind his head, and stared at the ceiling, obviously deep in

thought. Dan started counting on his fingers and muttering to himself. Gwen propped herself up on one elbow and became engrossed in her nails. Carl popped his fingers and drew the covers up over his head. Drew walked over and sat next to Rob in silence.

After a few minutes Grant had dropped off, his hands limp. Gwen had slumped onto her side and was curled up half in and half out of the covers. Carl's lump was now snoring softly and had dropped a few inches. Dan had passed out on his stomach, the number two still recognizable on his right hand. Drew took this opportunity to talk with Rob.

"So, what do you think of them?" he asked, "Not a bad group of kids." He tried not to show any emotion, but by the look on his Rob's face he obviously didn't do a good job.

"Don't try to fool me," Rob smirked, "You're absolutely appalled that Gwen is on our team."

Drew was sometimes amazed at how well Rob knew him. He was about to snap back a sharp retort when he noticed that Rob was looking back and forth from him to Gwen's sleeping form.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," Rob replied, "It's just, you both have blue eyes, and you have the same accent."

Drew didn't remember frowning or glaring, but the way Rob's eyes widened showed that he probably didn't look very happy.

"Hey, chill out," Rob said, raising his hands slightly, "It was just an observation."

As much as he hated the prospect, Drew couldn't help wondering. It was true that they looked similar, but did that really mean what Rob was implying?

3. Chapter 2

_Blam! Blam! Blam! _Drew ducked his head a bit lower below the curve of the rock he was crouched behind and slammed another magazine into his MA5 assault rifle. He waited for the spray of rounds to stop and leaned out from behind the cover. He saw three Marines hiding behind a log before another volley sent him scurrying back behind the rock. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Grant, watching from the cover of a bush. He waved his hand and in a flash Grant was beside him. Drew leaped up, sprayed the Marines with a hail of bullets, then came back down and directed his attention to Grant.

"Is Rob still in?" he asked.

"Yeah," Grant replied, "He's about ten meters to your right hidden in the brush, backing up Gwen."

That was good. Gwen was a great sniper, but she tended to get a little too single-minded while her eye was at the scope.

"We need to have him flank these guys," Drew said,

Grant pulled out a Magnum and lay prone next to the rock. The Marines were only expecting one Spartan and Grant slotted all three of them before they realized what was happening.

"No, we don't," Grant smirked.

Drew shook his head in amazement and reloaded his rifle.

"Come on," he said.

"I'll go and tell Rob we're moving," Grant replied, "He'll want to know so he can move too."

Drew mentally kicked himself for not thinking of that.

"All right, get moving," he said, "I'll move up to that fallen tree and cover you."

Without waiting for a reply Drew vaulted the rock and rushed the log. Behind him he heard the pounding of feet as Grant bolted for the brush. He reached the log and when he popped back up he surprised a group of Marines, who had probably intended to reinforce their comrades but instead had a close encounter with the business end of an MA5. Drew scanned ahead and suddenly heard footsteps behind him. He whirled around, expecting to see a Marine scout with a Magnum trained on him, but instead saw Gwen, who recoiled from the sight of his weapon pointing at her.

"Whoa!" she cried, her rifle coming up instinctively.

"Watch it!" Rob yelled, throwing himself between the two, "Put the weapons down. We're here to shoot Insurrectionists; not each other!"

Drew and Gwen lowered their weapons, eyeing each other warily.

"Now let's get moving," Rob said, "Red Team is moving for the objective in 2 minutes and we're supposed to be covering their approach."

The team started moving, but after a few yards Drew suddenly noticed something.

"Where are Carl and Dan?" he asked.

"They got hit 30 yards back," Grant replied.

Drew felt himself choking up. Even though it was just a training exercise it was still sad to lose a comrade in any situation. He was so engrossed in his sadness and anger that when a spray of bullets nearly gave him a close shave, Rob had to slam his head to get him to duck.

"Get your darn head down!" Rob yelled, "The Innies have set up a machine gun at the objective."

"Yep, noticed," Drew replied, examining his head for marking dye.

Suddenly there was a single shot and the firing stopped.

"About that machine gun," came Gwen's voice from up a nearby tree,
"Taken out with extreme prejudice."

Show off, thought Drew.

"Move!" yelled Rob,

"Covering!" yelled Gwen,

"Objective in sight!" yelled Grant,

"Incoming!" yelled Drew.

The squad hit the dust as a grenade went off. Luckily the stun fluid flew over their heads. Well, most of their heads.

"Ahhh!" Grant cried as the disc of fluid caught him full in the chest. He was knocked back a meter and then lay unmoving.

"Grant, noooo!" Drew yelled.

"We have to leave him!" Rob yelled back, "We have less than twenty seconds before we have to cover the Reds!"

As much as he hated Rob for abandoning their comrade, Drew knew he was right. He followed what remained of his squad as they crested the hill, catching the Marine who had thrown the grenade as he tried to flee. Drew emptied his entire clip into him and loved every minute of it. His squad had to pull him away before his used a whole other clip to finish the job. They raced for the objective zone just in time to see Red Team advancing towards the flag that was their objective.

"Look!" Gwen yelled.

Drew swept the area and spotted a Marine sniper about to take a potshot at the advancing Reds. Seeing the Marine about to defeat the entire unit from a concealed position, just like the last one who had killed Grant nearly did sparked something in Drew. He whipped up his rifle and fired a single shot. Time seemed to stand still as the bullet tore through the air. The shot caught the Marine across his faceplate and sent him flying. John, who Drew would recognize anywhere, grabbed the flag and raised it over his head. The Spartans had won.

"Yahoo!" Drew cheered. He turned to his squad, expecting them to be happy, but instead they just stared at him.

"What?" he asked.

"Drew," Rob said slowly, his eyes wide, "You just took out Tango's best sniper/counter-sniper."

"Yeah, so?" Drew asked, "He couldn't see me."

"You did it with a 150 yard headshot," Rob continued, "With iron sights, and barely enough time to breathe, much less get it trained."

Drew was still confused. All he had done was what needed to be done. What was so special?

"Do you know how many trained snipers can do what you just did?" Gwen asked as if reading his mind.

"I was just angry, and my adrenaline was pumping," Drew replied.

"That should have made it even harder," Gwen replied, "But you did it anyway. You're a born sniper."

Drew didn't know if one successful headshot made him a born sniper, but it was astonishing to get any kind of compliment out of Gwen these days. Ever since her friend Claire had washed out of training, she had just become more of the cold-hearted, deadly, efficient assassin that she had been before.

"Come on," said Rob, "We have to get back and tell the Red's who was actually responsible for the win."

Drew smiled slightly. It was always good to be able to get a one up on John. He was always treated like he was more special than anybody else. Drew patted the side of his rifle affectionately and followed his squad to the debriefing area. They had been joined by Grant, Dan, and Carl, who were still woozy from the stun rounds. Grant had a thick, fuzzy red line across his chest from the grenade. Dan had a collection of red dots scattered in a circle pattern around his chest from a lucky Marine. And finally, Carl had a red splatter right in the middle of his forehead from a Marine sniper.

"I guess Coyote Team wasn't Clean-armor Team this time." Dan smirked.

Drew laughed with the rest of the squad. With friends like this, was there anything that could stop him?

4. Chapter 3

I can't do this! Drew thought as the searing, aching pain in his head continued. He was lying on a hospital bed, IV's and tubes sticking out all over his body. His shorts were drenched with sweat and his bare chest heaved as he desperately fought against the pain. He had been told that the augmentation process would be tough, but he had never imagined something like this, and he was only in the first phase!

Suddenly the aching pain in his head subsided, but he had no rest. Instantly another pain, as if he had been stabbed by a serrated knife, started up in his right thigh. In between strains to get his teeth to unclench he looked around again to see how his squad was faring this time. Last he'd checked, Dan, Carl, and Grant were out cold and Rob was struggling very, very hard. Now it was just him and Gwen. Their eyes locked for a second, and then suddenly the third phase started, as if the knife that had stabbed them had been taken out, stabbed into the left thigh, and then been twisted and ran back and forth. Gwen let out a blood-curdling scream before her head lolled to one side and she was gone.

Now Drew was all alone. With the loss of all of his squad to blackness, he no longer had a reason to stay awake and be strong for them. Even though Rob was leader, and Drew respected that, he had noticed that in some situations his team looked more to him than to Rob for guidance. Thus he always tried to be strong. Now, he no longer had to. So, with a pleasurable sigh, he let the cold, gray tunnel that had been threatening to grow bigger grow all it wanted. The tunnel closed tighter and tighter, and as it did it grew blacker and then suddenly it closed and Drew was lost from the waking world.

Not fair! Drew's mind screamed as the pain continued. Unconsciousness was supposed to be an escape, a way to get away from pain. But he could still feel the augmentation phases as they pounded his body. Phase four felt as if he was being punched in the gut with metal knuckles tipped with spikes. Phase five felt like he was having a tooth pulled by a crane; a completely healthy one that had just grown in. Phases six and seven were kind of similar, except one of them had his spine being twisted into knots, and the other had his neck practically removed from his shoulders.

Finally, the final phase began to fade and Drew knew he was done, he had survived. But then the blackness started to turn white.

No, no, no! Drew thought in agony. Had he survived the entire process just to die at the end? He tried and tried to fight the growing whiteness, but it just kept coming until finally his vision turned the color of sun blasted snow and he felt no more.

When he woke up, Drew could tell that he had been out for a while, but thankfully he wasn't dead. Instead he was lying in a blank room on a comfortable hospital bed. The IV's and tubes were gone, and a blue hospital gown had replaced his sweat soaked shorts. His pillow was propped up enough that he could look around a bit, but he was still really sore. The rest of his squad was also in the room. They all looked fresh and happy, smiles on their faces as they relished the release from the terror and agony of the augmentation process. When Drew tried sitting up to get a better look, his head swam so much that he hastily put it back down.

After lying in silence for a few moments Drew heard the rest of his squad waking up. Dan and Rob sat up much like Drew did, and went back down just as fast, while Gwen and Carl shot up as soon as their eyes fluttered open and instantly sank back into unconsciousness. They all continued lying there in silence. Then Rob tried breaking the ice by looking over at Drew and asking how he was. Drew replied that he was okay, subtly putting a tone in his voice that he didn't want to talk. Rob graciously understood.

Drew didn't know how long they lay there, staring up at the ceiling. It could have been seconds, minutes, hours, days and Drew would never have known. Then suddenly the door slid open and four people walked in. One was a middle-aged woman who Drew thought he recognized from training and another long ago meeting he didn't quite remember, two were scientists dressed just like the ones that had started the augmentation process, and the last one was a guard, Magnum at his belt. The woman walked back and forth between the two rows of beds. Then she started to speak.

"My name is Dr. Catherine Halsey," she announced, "And I am the director of this program."

"You," Drew heard himself saying, "You came to my school, had me watch a coin, the day before I was kidnapped."

So he did remember that long ago meeting. Drew saw recognition flash in the eyes of his squad mates as well as the woman locked her gaze with his.

"I am surprised you still remember that," she said, surprised, "Being as young as you were, and the training and punishment you have sustained. The extra augmentation must be working."

Drew's eyes widened. Extra augmentation?

"I know what you must be thinking," Dr. Halsey continued, "Why would we give you extra augmentation if the original was so bad," She paused to sweep the room and continued.

"There are two reasons. The first is that we needed a convincing cover-up for your disappearance, and you were all almost certain to survive, so we increased the pain to cause you to flat-line, or at least appear to." This revelation stunned Drew. Dr. Halsey had killed them all on purpose? A wave of rage flooded over him that this woman would have the audacity to harm his squad in such a way. He wanted to take the guards Magnum and kill her right here, but then he managed to remind himself that there must have been a reason. She wouldn't have murdered vital 14 year-old super-soldiers unless it was part of some important plan. His suspicions were confirmed when Dr. Halsey continued,

"We had to do this to mask both your disappearance and the special augmentation you received, designed to increase certain areas vital to your mission beyond that of regular Spartans," She began locking eyes with certain Spartans as she spoke.

"Leadership," she said, glancing to Rob.

"Sharp eyes and a steady hand," she said, glancing to Gwen.

"Technological proficiency," she said, glancing to Grant.

"Skills in mathematics," she said, glancing to Dan.

"Reflexes," she said, glancing to Carl.

"And finally, greater memory recall," she said, glancing at Drew. She lingered on him for a minute, then walked to the front and surveyed the group one final time.

"You will need all of these to succeed," she announced, "When you all have fully regained your strength, you will be directed to a secret ONI facility, where you will receive your first mission, along with your new armor and weapons. Good luck Spartans." And with that, she spun on her heel and walked stiffly out of the room.

Drew looked around at the shocked faces of his squad. They still couldn't seem to grasp that they were special, more advanced than

their other Spartan comrades. However, Drew could tell that this blessing also came with a curse. The rest of the unit seemed to grasp it as soon as he did. ONI had pulled them so secretly for a reason. In the eyes of everyone, besides Dr. Halsey herself and other very specific people, they were supposed to be dead. In short, they would never be able to have contact with their Spartan comrades ever again. Drew knew that that hurt his comrades in more ways than one. They all had friends in the program. Gwen had befriended a Spartan named Linda after Claire washed out. Rob had befriended a young Spartan candidate named Frederic. Drew had become friends with a candidate named Jorge during the Wilderness Survival Training Course. Grant was friends with a Spartan named Samuel. Dan had befriended a Spartan named Jerome. And Carl had befriended a Spartan named Isaac. Now they would never see them again.

As he lay in the bunk that night thinking about what he would have said to Jorge had he been able to say goodbye, Drew couldn't help thinking about what Dr. Halsey had said about better memory recall. He looked at Gwen and something fluttered in his mind, like a memory. It was similar to the feeling he had gotten when he saw Dr. Halsey. Could he have more connection to Gwen than he thought? It was preposterous, but could he?

5. Chapter 4

Drew reached out to steady himself as he took his first steps in the Mjolnir Mark IV Powered Assault Armor. It was amazing the sense of invincibility, the sense of power that he felt. As he wobbled around the armory, he caught glimpses of his squad mates doing the same. The ONI tech specialist watching over them walked from Spartan to Spartan, taking readings and asking questions. Each time he received an answer he checked off a box on his clipboard.

"Okay, so that's movement," the tech specialist said, engrossed in his clipboard, "Now we need to test your Heads Up Display." He gestured towards a table where one of each of every UNSC small arm in existence, including a rocket launcher, Spartan Laser, machine gun, and flamethrower, was spread out.

"Grab a weapon and wait for the image to appear," the tech specialist continued, "Since this is the first time the suits are operating, they will need a minute to calibrate the sensors."

It was like releasing a pack of toddlers into a candy store. Gwen and Grant both raced for the sniper rifle, but Gwen snagged it first, resulting in Grant having to unhappily resort to a DMR. Carl seemed to be having trouble deciding, but eventually he picked up the flamethrower, slinging the napalm tank over his shoulder. Dan wasted no time in picking up the grenade launcher. Rob grabbed a pair of SMGs. Drew took a good long look and then settled on the shotgun. As he loaded the weapon, an image of it appeared in the top corner of his HUD, along with an ammo count. An image of the Magnum the Spartans always kept at their hips appeared above the image of the shotgun.

"Whoa," Carl's voice said over the helmet comm. system, "Cool tech."

The tech specialist told them to switch to their sidearm. When they

did, the images flipped. When they switched back to their primary, the images flipped back.

"Excellent," the tech specialist said, "HUD weapons sensors calibrated. Now we need to calibrate your targeting system." The tech specialist motioned towards a door with a sign that said "Battlefield Simulator".

"Why wouldn't we just use the firing range?" Rob asked.

"Because your targeting system needs to be calibrated in such a way that it will stay dead on even when your weapon is moving very fast," The tech specialist replied, "So we need to calibrate it in an actual battle scenario." The tech specialist started hurrying them towards the simulators.

"Plus we need to test your reaction time and make sure you're comfortable with moving in the suit," he continued as they entered, "There are six training rooms, one for each of you."

With that, the squad double-timed it to their assigned training room. Drew ducked into the second one and stood at the center.

"Simulation beginning in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1," said a computerized voice. Drew whipped up his shotgun and worked the pump as the gray walls melted away to reveal a pristine forest. In a split second the forest became a battle zone. Holographic UNSC Marines armed with a variety of weapons came charging out of the brush in squads of six, screaming a battle cry. Drew took aim and began firing. His first group of shells disintegrated the first wave, but more came rushing out before he could reload. He snatched out his Magnum and fired with precise shots, killing the current wave and the next before he had to switch clips. He sensed a break in the waves and took the opportunity to reload his shotgun.

Suddenly a gigantic wave broke out from every direction. Bullets pinged against Drew's armor as he whirled around, blasting away with first his shotgun and then his Magnum when he ran out of shells. He could tell that the charge was weakening, but suddenly he pulled the trigger and heard only a click. He then resorted to his God-given weapons, punching madly and swinging his empty shotgun like a club.

Just when he thought he would be overwhelmed, the holograms disappeared and he was done.

"Simulation complete," the computerized voice announced, "Final grade, 100."

Drew couldn't believe it. He had gotten a perfect score in his first training simulation! He walked out of the room to see his squadmates watching a replay of his fight. Although it had seemed like hours it had really only been minutes. Drew watched himself blast, punch, and club. He also saw things he hadn't noticed during the simulation, like how he had instinctively tried to dodge blasts, and his armor had given him the reflex time to do it.

"Nice form," Carl pointed out when an image of Drew knocking a squad leader across the room appeared on the screen.

"It was okay," Drew replied, "How did all of you guys' simulations go?"

"I did all right," Rob replied.

"I got at least twenty headshots," Grant said proudly.

"I got twenty-five," Gwen smirked.

"I really enjoyed making fire," Carl chuckled.

"I love making things go boom," Dan sighed.

Drew chuckled. Suddenly he heard the sounds of footsteps. He turned to see a young corporal standing at attention, staring at him.

"At ease, corporal," Drew said calmly, "What do you need?"

"Commander Horin would like to see you all, sir," the corporal replied, "Something about a briefing."

Finally, some action, thought Drew. He gathered the rest of the squad and they trooped towards Commander Horin's office. When they arrived, Horin waved them in.

"Sit down, Coyote," Horin said, motioning towards some chairs. When the squad had sat, Horin grabbed a controller and dimmed the lights. A screen appeared out of the wall and a projector out of the ceiling. An image of a heavily defended base surrounded by troops came up.

"This is Jaguar Base," Horin explained, "It is a key Insurrectionist facility on the Innie-held planet of Tokoran."

"Looks a little highly defended for an Innie base," Dan commented.

"Yes it does, Coyote 4," Horin replied, "That is part of the reason we're sending you in."

Seeing the puzzled looks on the team's faces, Horin switched to a new slide, showing a fuzzy photo of a heavyset man in battle gear.

"This is Bart Barrett, a key Insurrectionist leader," Horin explained, "He is rumored to be in the area, which might explain the sudden rise in security."

"Then why do you need us?" Rob asked, "Just send in ODSTs."

"Ah, that is the point," Horin said, "The brass thinks that it might be a trap to lure in our forces." Gwen nodded in agreement,

"Normally, a rise in security is a surefire way to spot when an enemy commander is arriving," she announced, "It would be easy to fake it and draw vital enemy troops right into an ambush." Horin nodded in amazement,

"Exactly, Coyote 3," he said, "That is why we are sending you in to

reconnoiter the situation. Your mission is to get in and find out what is going on." Horin knit his fingers and continued,

"If Barrett really is there, neutralize him," Horin ordered, "If it is a trap, report back and await further instructions.
Understood?"

"Sir, yes sir!" the squad chorused.

"Excellent," said the Horin, "The UNSC Charon-class light frigate Dark of the Moon is awaiting your arrival. You will receive further details when you board."

The team rose, saluted, and left. They ran for the barracks and gathered their gear. Drew was the most excited of all. Ever since beginning his advanced training at the secret ONI facility where they now lived, he had wanted to get out on mission. He had read dozens of dispatches that Grant, who was turning out to be quite the tech expert, had managed to hack from secure ONI servers. They told of Spartan missions in every place imaginable. Drew was so excited to finally join them that the short trip to the Dark of the Moon's docking bay was starting to sound like a trip to the gates of Heaven.

"Beautiful, just beautiful," Drew said in amazement as the squad hurried down the walkway towards the Dark of the Moon's airlock. Although the walkway was covered, it had windows running the length of it that gave a stunning view of the ship. Its point defense guns frowned out from alcoves in the ship's hull, pointing towards the sky in case the Insurrectionists were dumb enough to attempt an assault. Drew knew he had to look at it some more, so he stopped and walked over to the window.

"Come on, Drew," Rob insisted, stopping. The rest of the squad halted as well and stood silently.

"You guys go on," Drew said, waving them towards the airlock, "I'll just be a minute."

Rob shrugged and walked back to the squad.

"Just make sure you're in the cryo bay in ten minutes," Rob called over his shoulder. Drew gave a half-hearted salute as the squad disappeared into the bowels of the frigate. Drew stood a long time just gazing out at the ship, admiring everything, especially the huge MAC gun that took up the entire bow of the ship.

Just then, Drew heard the sound of footsteps. He turned to see a young woman in naval officer's attire walking up to him. He saluted and the officer waved him to at ease. She turned to the window and followed his gaze to the ship's MAC gun.

"A beautiful piece of hardware isn't it?" she commented. Drew nodded. The officer looked him over.

"Do you have somewhere to be, Spartan?" she asked. Drew looked at his watch and realized that he had less than two minutes to get to the cryo bay. Barely remembering to salute, he thanked the officer and raced for the airlock. Even with Spartan super-speed he was still quite late getting to the bay. When he got there all his friends were

already asleep.

"Look who finally decided to show up," one of the cryo-techs commented.

Drew ignored him and stepped into place. The next thing he knew he was out cold. Literally.

6. Chapter 5

Some time later, Drew was woken from his cryo-induced slumber to the sounds of the ships slipspace drive still operating. The cryotechs were happily going about the process of waking him and testing his armor systems; Drew thought one of them was whistling. They didn't seem to notice that they weren't even out of slipspace yet. As the techs began to secure his cryo capsule Drew tapped one of them on the shoulder.

"Excuse me," he asked politely, "Would you mind telling me why you woke me up before we came out of slip'?"

"Sure," the tech replied, "The captain wants you and your squad ready to drop before we come out of slip' so we can spend as little time as possible in-system. It is an Innis stronghold you know."

"Wait, drop?" Drew asked a hint of worry in his voice, "Nobody said anything about dropping."

Before the tech could clarify the hologram console in the center of the cryo bay projected an image of a young woman in Native American clothing. Drew though she looked kind of like the Apache Indians he had studied during training. The young woman turned to him and smiled.

"Good morning, Spartan," she said cheerfully, "I'm Nyla, the Dark of the Moon's AI. I was told to notify you that the captain had requested your presence on the bridge." The hologram then disappeared.

"Looks like someone has a place to be," one of the techs commented.

"I'll head there directly," Drew replied. He then surveyed the room and noticed something was missing.

"Where is the rest of my squad?" he asked the techs.

"We were having a little trouble waking you up, so they went on ahead," the tech replied.

"What do you mean, trouble?" Drew asked.

"Well, let's just say that if your buddy Grant wasn't such a tech geek, you would still be an icicle."

"Oh," Drew replied, "That's a happy thought."

Without waiting for the tech to answer Drew headed for the bridge. When he got there the rest of his squad was standing around a

hologram showing a portion of the planet Tokoran. A 3D model of Jaguar Base was in the center. Standing with them was the young captain Drew had talked too before boarding the ship.

"Welcome, Spartan," the woman said, "Since you missed the meet and greet, let me introduce myself. I'm Captain Lyn Mowsen, commander of this vessel."

"Nice to meet you Captain," Drew replied. Captain Mowsen nodded and leaned over the tactical display.

"Since everyone's here," she said, "Let's get started." Drew walked over to stand beside Rob as Captain Mowsen zoomed out from Jaguar Base to show a 3D model of Tokoran.

"This is the planet Tokoran," Mowsen explained, "It is an Innies refueling station and training facility at the very fringes of the Sol system." She hit a few buttons on the projector and mini-models of defense satellites glowed red in orbit above the planet.

"This is what's left of the UNSC defensive screen," she continued, "Two years ago Tokoran was the planet chosen to test if such a screen was possible. When the Innies came to this planet the station techs were already on the way towards mutiny due to bad command and conditions. When the Innies arrived promising a better solution, the techs revolted. What stations they couldn't commandeer, about 10% of the screen, they outright destroyed." She paused here to zoom in on one of the stations.

"The MAC guns on these stations are powerful enough to destroy this frigate with one blast," she continued, "The required ship numbers to punch through the web is astronomical. Thus, High Command has mostly abandoned the planet, until now." Mowsen switched the display to a projection of blurry security footage showing a hulking man in body armor walking down a hallway, flanked by a dozen guards.

"This is hacked security footage from hidden cameras inside Jaguar only ONI knew about," Mowsen explained, "That man was Bart Barrett, a former UNSC engineer. He was the executive commander of the Tokoran defense grid." Mowsen switched to a UNSC officers academy graduation picture of Barrett.

"It was part of the ONI security protocols that only the commander and his executive officer knew the entire specifications of the system," Mowsen continued, "That way, if the techs revolted they would only know how their individual systems worked, not the whole system." Mowsen then switched to a schematic of the stations targeting console.

"In addition," she continued, "The CO and XO are the only people who know the codes to activate the targeting and firing system."

"So if we take him outâ€|" Gwen said, speaking for the first time.

"The grid can no longer fire," Mowsen finished, nodding.

"Why wouldn't he just share the info with other officers?" Grant asked.

"The targeting computer that requires the codes was also specially designed so that only the CO and XO chosen at the beginning of the project could access it," Mowsen explained, "An unrecoverable computer chip implanted in the CO and XO makes sure that another person can only access the system if both of them are dead." Mowsen then switched to a dual display of the stations targeting console and Barrett's graduation picture.

"You have already been notified of your mission," she continued, "However, I want you let you know of a secondary mission that Commander Horin believed was not necessary but is important nonetheless." Mowsen zoomed in on the targeting console again.

"Even if you eliminate Barrett, the Innies will still be capable to fire the system unless you knock out the computer itself," she explained, "Commander Horin overlooked this detail. I don't know why, but I do know that despite what the commander may say, if we don't knock out that computer the whole mission is worthless."

"That's insubordination!" Rob exclaimed. Mowsen held up a hand to quiet him.

"Due to our special circumstances as an off-the-grid unit," Mowsen explained, "ONI has given me special authority to give you secondary missions as I see fit if the current mission parameters are insufficient without needing authority from a superior officer, as long as said mission does not require further ONI assistance or resources beyond what I have already been assigned." She then switched the picture again to the 3D tactical display. The projection now showed a 2 kilometer square section of Tokoran, with Jaguar Base at the center.

"This is as far as the Innies ground defenses, ie, patrols, guns, etc. extend," Mowsen explained. She then zoomed out to show a 5 kilometer square section, "This is as far as the sensors extend." She stood back from the tactical display and clasped her hands behind her back.

"In order to maintain the element of surprise you will be deploying in drop pods camouflaged to look like debris," Mowsen explained, "We will use a captured Innies transponder to get behind the satellites and then jettison you from our garbage bay along with the rest of the trash, per standard protocol." She said the last part with a smirk.

"Sounds easy enough," Rob said, ignoring the insult. Suddenly the ship lurched and the planet Tokoran appeared in the forward viewports.

"Unidentified ship, identify yourself," a brawny voice said over the radio.

"Hurry!" Mowsen exclaimed, heading for the communications station, "Head to the garbage bay, Nyla will explain when you arrive."

The Spartans didn't have to be told twice. They raced for the garbage bay, tripping over themselves in their haste and excitement. When they arrived Nyla was waiting for them.

"Enjoy the ride," she said mischievously, indicating the six pods in

front of her, each marked with a particular Spartans number. Mowsen's voice then came over the intercom.

"Your weapons are already in the pods," she announced, "Standard MA5's and Magnums, as well as a special weapon for each of you, gleaned from training scores and preferences. Supplies are concealed in the garbage; ammo is in the boxes of damaged components, food is in the trash bags, and water is in the barrels. Good luck."

The six Spartans of Coyote Team each stepped into a pod and locked down the hatch as the door opened and they were jettisoned into space.

7. Chapter 6

Several hours after the drop, Drew was brought out of unconsciousness by the sound of banging. With a great deal of effort he cranked his eyes open to see Rob pounding an armored fist on the window screen of his pod. Standing behind him was Gwen, her rifle raised. Still groggy, Drew fumbled with the manual release. Suddenly it clicked and the screen flew forward, knocking Rob into Gwen. The two Spartans went down in a heap, the screen on top of them. In a flash Drew's grogginess evaporated and he dashed forward to get the screen off his friend. Grant moved to assist him, but Carl and Dan just stood chuckling in the background.

"What are you two laughing at?" Gwen snarled as she dragged herself out from under the screen that Grant and Drew had just lifted.

"Nothing, nothing at all," Dan replied, barely holding back his laughter.

"Come on, guys," Rob said, checking to make sure his weapons were cleared, "We have to get moving before the Innies figure out the trick and come to search this place."

Dan and Carl instantly stopped laughing and began searching the surrounding brush for supplies. Drew extended a hand to Rob and pulled him to his feet.

"Thanks," Rob said gratefully.

"You're welcome," Drew replied, "Sorry about shooting that screen at you." Rob waved the apology away.

"I shouldn't have been standing so close," he admitted, "This is the first time any of us has dropped in one of these things, and when you didn't wake up immediately, I feared the worst."

Drew sighed. First the cryo techs couldn't wake him up from cryo sleep, and then he was knocked unconscious from a drop pod landing. Drew hoped he wouldn't get a reputation for being accident prone.

"Sir, I've found something I think you'll want to see," Carl's voice said. Rob ran over and poked his head through the bushes. He came back and beckoned to Drew, who had been pulling his shotgun from the pod. Grant, who had been inspecting his communications gear for

damage from the drop, and Gwen, who had been pulling security in the opposite direction. The three Spartans raced over to him.

"Have a look," Rob said, pulling away the branches. Drew did, and he was shocked by the sight. A massive array of vehicles was massed within the confines of a barbed wire fence a few miles away.

Scorpions, Warthogs, Pelicans, Hornets and more were spread out in neat lines, the small figures of Insurrectionist technicians scurrying between them.

"It's a secret Innies vehicle depot," Gwen said with amazement, "I don't think even ONI expected they had this much at their disposal."

"I don't think the Innies did either," Grant observed, pointing towards a nearby structure, "That's a UNSC rapid deployment shelter. It's obvious that these vehicles belonged to whatever troops were garrisoned here, before the Innies took over." Rob nodded in agreement.

"Whatever it is," Carl said, pulling out his Magnum and working the bolt, "It sure complicates things for us." As if confirming his suspicions, a transport 'hog roared out of the depot and raced towards them.

"This is not good," Rob said, following Carl's example by sliding magazines into his SMGs, "We'll have to either take them out or hide."

"I vote hide," Drew said. The rest of the squad looked at him in astonishment.

"Think about it," he continued, "If we take out that party, the depot will get suspicious, so we'll have to take out the depot. But if we do that, then the base will get suspicious, which may permanently close our window." Rob nodded, agreeing with his logic.

"Agreed," He said, "Grant, Gwen, you're our resident camo experts. I'll say you have about ten minutes to get those pods concealed." Grant and Gwen saluted and raced back towards the drop site.

"Dan, Carl," Rob continued, "Keep looking for supplies." The two Spartans raced off eagerly.

Rob now turned to Drew.

"I need you to grab the sniper rifle and shinny up that tree," he said, pointing, "With Gwen on camo duty I need you to be our cover sniper." Drew nodded, although inside he was unsure.

"You got it boss," he replied, walking over and picking up the rifle. He then walked over to the indicated tree and hauled himself up. He got comfortable and propped the rifle on his shoulder, using the scope like binoculars.

"You set?" Rob's voice crackled in his earpiece.

"Affirmative," Drew replied.

"What do you see?" Rob asked. Drew swept the surrounding landscape

with the sniper scope. He finally locked onto the Innies transport and zoomed in.

"Looks like just a simple search party," he announced, "MA5s all around, not a heavy weapon or sniper rifle to speak of."

"Good," Rob replied, "That makes our job a whole lot easier. Maintain your position and report when they get within one mile of us."

"Roger that," Drew replied, severing the link. He continued to monitor the approaching Warthog when suddenly it stopped. One of the Insurrectionist scouts got out and swept the area with a pair of binoculars. Drew was observing him with interest when suddenly another voice came over his earpiece.

"Rob, this is Grant, the pods have been concealed," the voice announced.

"All supplies within a quarter mile radius have been recovered," Carl's voice joined in.

"Excellent," Rob replied, "Find some cover everybody, and make sure it's good. Daylight's coming and it will be too easy for them to spot us if you're not concealed well."

Drew adjusted his footing and watched as the scout got back into the Warthog. The transport roared towards them, closing the gap quickly. As it neared the one mile security range, Drew opened a link to Rob.

"Rob, this is Drew, the Warthog has reached one mile away, over," he announced into the receiver built into his helmet.

"Roger that," Rob replied, "Get ready everybody, here they come."

Drew held his breath as the Warthog got closer and closer. He could clearly hear the puttering roar of the engine. Before he knew it the search party had arrived at the crash site. Finally, the moment of truth had arrived.

"Hacking their comms now," Grant whispered. Suddenly Drew could hear what the Innies were saying, word for word. He slowly shook his head; Grant was getting good.

"Recon One to command," The Innies commander's voice said, "We have arrived at the coordinates provided; nothing out of the ordinary."

"Look harder Recon One," another voice said over the radio, "We have solid intelligence that a Spartan squad will be landing soon; that mess the captured cruiser jettisoned couldn't have been just trash."

Drew was stunned. Captured cruiser? Had Dark of the Moon been captured? And how did the Innies get intelligence of their mission? Drew was shocked out of his contemplation by the sound of the recon party commander again hailing whoever his commanding officer was.

"Command, repeat, there is nothing here," the commander said, "We have searched the whole site, top to bottom."

"They must have moved on," the commanding officer admitted, "Return to base." The sound of footsteps penetrated Drew's helmet, soon joined by the sound of the Warthog roaring away.

"Did anyone else catch that?" Gwen's voice said over the comm.

"Affirmative," Rob replied, "Looks like we have three missions now."

"Holy cow," Dan's voice joined in from the direction of the landing zone, "No wonder they couldn't find anything; what the heck did you guys do to our pods?"

"I'll never tell," Grant said. Drew was surprised at the hint of mischief concealed in Grant's voice. Grant was not the humorous type by a long shot.

"What's our next move sir?" Carl's voice asked.

"It's too bright to do anything right now," Rob replied, "We'll camp here and wait for darkness. Everybody return to the dropsite."

Drew was happy to comply. The prolonged period in the tree had caused several of his joints to cramp up. He was a Spartan, not a monkey. He untangled himself from the branches and leaped down to the ground. He was met there by Gwen, who held out her gloved hand.

"Rifle, please," she said, beckoning.

"What's the magic word?" Drew said with a hint of sarcasm, holding the rifle behind his back.

"Hand over the rifle or your next destination is the tree," Gwen snapped.

"All right, all right," Drew said, tossing over the rifle and holding his hands up, "I was just joking around."

"Yeah, I know," Gwen said over her shoulder as she walked away.

"Sheesh," Drew said as he walked up to Rob, who was preparing a sleeping space for himself, "I didn't think anybody could be that cold."

"Give her a break," Rob said, lying down, "Claire was her very best friend."

"You expect me to believe that she's still hung up on that?" Drew asked, unbelieving.

"Yeah, actually, I do," Rob replied, taking off his helmet and setting it aside. He put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes.

"By the way," he said as Drew began to walk away, "You have first watch." Drew muttered something under his breath he knew Rob couldn't hear and then trudged back over to the tree. Using some branches and a length of strong cord he managed to make a kind of seat for himself so it would be more comfortable. He made sure that all of his weapons were in the proper place; shotgun on his back, MA5 in his hands, Magnum at his belt and settled down for a long night.

As he shifted around on his makeshift perch Drew managed to get a glimpse of Gwen's sleeping form. Her helmet was off, giving a stunning view of her brown hair and blue eyes. That nagging feeling he'd had ever since the augmentation process returned, except it was stronger this time. Images of Gwen, a younger Gwen, started to flash in his mind, images he had never had before. He remembered what Dr. Halsey had said about them possessing greater memory recall. Was it possible that he and Gwen were connected in some way? Drew dismissed the thoughts and prepared for cramped joints.

8. Chapter 7

"Drew!" a voice yelled. Drew yawned and rolled onto his side.

"I don't want to go to school," he muttered, "Five more minutes." Suddenly a shot slammed into the dirt right beside Drew's head.

"What in the name ofâ€¢!" Drew shouted, jumping to his feet. Standing in front of him was Gwen, the barrel of her pistol still smoking.

"Wakey, wakey, eggs and bacey!" she said, blowing the smoke off. Drew stormed up to her, his hand on his own pistol.

"What is the matter with you!" he yelled.

"You overslept," Gwen replied, "The sun dropped below the horizon approximately five minutes ago."

"So you wasted precious ammo just to give me a wakeup call!" Drew yelled. The two Spartans were now an inch away from being completely nose to nose. Suddenly Rob stepped between them, shoving them aside with a hand on each of their chest plates.

"Everybody chill!" Rob yelled.

"Butâ€¢" Drew started.

"I said chill!" Rob said again, "Gwen is right, and although I don't agree with her methods, we have to get moving now." Drew smacked Rob's hand aside and bent down to collect his gear. A few minutes later the squad gathered around Rob, who activated a holographic map.

"All right, listen up guys," Rob said, pressing some buttons on the map, "According to ONI intelligence, we have less than 24 hours to find Barrett." Rob looked at Carl.

"Can you grab us some transportation?" he asked.

"Sure thing," Carl replied. He grabbed his MA5 and slung it on his back. He then bounded off through the woods. Within minutes the squad was cruising through the darkness in a transport Warthog. As they approached the bases scanner range, Carl brought the transport to a stop.

"We'll have to walk it from here," he said.

"Wait, I have a question," Drew said, "Don't these things have trackers? How did you deal with it?"

"Strapped it to a mortar round from their base and fired it a mile in the opposite direction," Carl replied.

"Good thinking," Gwen said, "Even if they do find out that we took it they'll think we went east instead of west."

"Bingo," Carl said.

"All right, that's enough chit-chat," Rob said, arming his MA5, "Let's get moving." In a split second the whole squad was all-business. They gathered around Rob as he opened his holo-map once more.

"Gwen, I want you on overwatch here," he said, pointing to a small hill containing a grove of trees, "Call out guard patterns and suspicious activity. Dan, back her up." The two Spartans nodded and raced for the hill.

"Grant, you and Carl go to this door and slice the lock," Rob continued, "Drew and I will back you up." Carl and Grant both nodded.

"Once you're in, follow the hallway to this maintenance hatch," Rob said, "Follow that until you reach the security station. When you're in, slice the cameras and hardwire an all-clear picture on the internal cameras." Rob then closed the map.

"You have five minutes to slice the cameras, at which point Drew and I will breach at another location and start moving towards the rendezvous point at the command center," Rob said as the rest of the squad prepared to go in, "Try not to kill anyone, but if you need to, make sure to hide the body." The squad saluted and moved out to their respective assignments. Drew slid six shells into his shotgun and worked the pump. He then followed Rob through the darkness towards the compound.

"Activate night vision," Rob said into his radio, "Infiltration team, we're going silent in three, two, one, mark." Drew clicked his night vision scanners on and turned off his radio. From now on, the squad, besides Gwen, who was outside the scanner range, would be communicating only by hand signals unless there was an emergency. The order also signaled to Gwen that she did not need to wait for confirmation on anything; Rob trusted her to use common sense. The same went for the rest of the unit. This combination of overwatch and radio silence was rare but still used.

Drew clenched his shotgun tighter as he and Rob moved from crate to crate in the compounds vehicle depository. Suddenly Rob, who was in front of him, held up his hand for Drew to stop. Drew looked over

Rob's shoulder and saw the problem. A mechanic was on his back under a Warthog just a few feet ahead of them. Rob looked around, making sure there was no one looking, and reached a hand across the gap between their crate and the mechanics slider. He grabbed it lightly and signaled to Drew that he was going to drag the slider towards them and cover the mechanics mouth. Drew was to hit the pressure point on the mechanics shoulder to knock him out. They would return him to his place and move on. Drew nodded that he understood. Rob wrenched the slider towards them, too fast. It was only supposed to come at them at a moderate speed so the mechanic would reach them before he had a chance to yell. However, Rob underestimated his Spartan super-strength. As the mechanic shot towards them at 70 miles per hour, Drew reacted faster than any other soldier could. In a split second he stopped the slider cold with his gloved fist and smashed the butt of his rifle into the mechanics face. The mechanics eyes rolled back into his head and he went completely limp as Drew slid him back under the Warthog.

Rob looked at Drew with a little bit of shock showing in his body language. He cocked his head quizzically, slashed his throat with his finger, and pointed at Drew and then the mechanic. He was asking if Drew had killed the mechanic. Drew shrugged and signaled that they should move on. Rob nodded and they moved on. In a few minutes they were in sight of the door they were to breach. Rob stopped and signaled for Drew to wait. Drew looked at the clock in his visor and saw they had ten seconds until they were to breach.

"Rob, you got two tangos approaching your position," the sound of Gwen's voice nearly gave Drew a heart attack, "They are coming around the corner of the building, estimate five seconds until they are in visual range." Rob waved Drew forward, and as they ran he signaled him to get into position to breach. The two Spartans raced to the door, which thankfully had an alcove just big enough to hide them, and Drew placed the barrel of his shotgun against the lock. The shotgun had been fitted with a super-secret ONI suppressor. It blew the door open and the two Spartans ducked inside just as the two guards walked past the alcove just in time to be yanked inside and pounded by the two Spartans. Rob and Drew hid the bodies in a closet and started moving through the corridors.

"All right," Rob said, stopping for a minute to consult his watch, "They should be preparing to breach by now." The two Spartans hurried down the corridors, which were amazingly empty.

"Where are all the guards?" Drew asked.

"Don't worry about it," Rob replied, "Focus on the mission." The two Spartans finally reached a reinforced door that had the words "Command Center" emblazoned into the wall above it.

"Are we going in quietly, or loud?" Drew asked.

"We're not selling Girl Scout cookies here," Rob replied, "We're going in loud." Drew nodded and placed a demo charge on the locks. The two Spartans looked away as the charge exploded, taking the locks with it. The two Spartans raced in to be faced with a dozen rogue ODST's, all with guns pointed at them. In the corner, Grant and Dan raced in to the same predicament.

"What are we going to do sir?" Grant asked.

"Want us to take them down?" Dan asked.

"No," Rob replied, "Give up."

"What?" Drew asked, startled.

"Trust me," Rob said. The four Spartans laid their weapons on the floor.

"Good choice," A hulking man in body armor spoke up from the other side of the room, "Welcome to Jaguar Base Coyote Team. I am Bart Barrett." The team barely noticed their target. All their eyes were focused on the man standing next to him.

"Commander Horin!" they yelled in unison.

9. Chapter 8

"Horin, you snake!" Drew yelled his hand on his pistol.

"Come on, Coyote 2," Horin laughed, "You really didn't think it was an accident that I told you not to knock out the computer did you?"

"Actually, we did take out the computer," Grant said. Drew and Rob looked at him in surprise.

"It was on the way," Carl explained.

"Irrelevant," Horin said, "Mr. Barrett here still has the codes. We will simply repair the console."

"Not if we kill him first," Rob said defiantly. Barrett laughed.

"You are in no position to make threats," he said, "We have you all surrounded, and we have your little captain to use as a little extra leverage." He waved his hand to an ODST who looked like the leader. He was holding a gagged and struggling Captain Mowsen with one hand pinning her arm behind her back and the other putting a pistol to her head.

"I suggest you drop your remaining weapons," Barrett said. Drew turned off his external comlink and spoke directly to Rob.

"What now?" he asked.

"Watch," Rob chuckled. As if on cue there was a loud thwack and one of the ODSTs slumped to the ground with a bullet hole in the back of his helmet. Three more shots dropped three more rogues. Gwen was going to work.

"You fools!" Barrett yelled, "I told you to block the windows!"

"We did!" the leader yelled. Before the rogues could figure out what was happening or even kill their hostage Drew, Rob, Grant, and Carl, bullets pinging off their armor, whipped out their pistols and took out every single soldier. Rob walked up to Barrett and leveled his

pistol.

"No, wait!" Barrett yelled, "We can't!" Rob fired and the Innie slumped to the ground with a bullet hole in his forehead.

"What do we do with Horin?" Grant asked.

"Bring him along," Rob said, "I'm sure we can figure out something." With no single shred of restraint Drew walked over to Horin, who was trying to sneak out the door, and grabbed him. Rob untied Captain Mowsen's bonds and removed her gag before turning to bind and gag the treacherous commander with them.

"Perfect timing Coyote Team," Mowsen said, rubbing her wrists.

"No problem," Rob replied. Drew picked up Commander Horin and slung him over his shoulder.

"Let's move," Drew said. As if on cue they heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway. Carl picked up his assault rifle and stepped into the hallway. His spray of gunfire instantly stopped the reinforcements in their tracks. He waved the squad ahead and they hurried into the corridor.

"Where is everybody else?" Rob asked Captain Mowsen as they ran.

"Still aboard the _Moon," Mowsen replied, "Do you have a plan?"

"Yeah," Rob replied, "First we'll need to find a way to get aboard."

"They have Pelicans in the hangar," Mowsen said, "Follow me!" The captain lead the Spartans through the maze of corridors until they reached a large hangar filled with Pelicans and Hornets.

"Can any of you fly one of these things?" Mowsen asked.

"I can," Grant replied. The Spartans easily neutralized the few Insurrectionist technicians and pilots before racing aboard the closest Pelican. Grant slid into the pilot's seat and powered the ship up. Meanwhile Drew chucked Horin on the floor of the passenger bay and Rob leaped into the copilot's seat and activated the Pelican's communication system.

"Gwen, Dan," he said, "We're on our way in a commandeered Pelican. Be ready."

"Roger that," Gwen's voice replied. Suddenly the Pelican shuddered as Grant wildly dodged the sporadic Insurrectionist anti-aircraft fire. As they approached Gwen and Dan's position Grant opened a comm. channel to them.

"I only have time to slow down, not land," he said, "I'm opening the back hatch." There was a jaw-rattling thrum as the doors lowered and two metallic thumps as Gwen and Dan leaped aboard.

"We're on!" Gwen yelled, "Go!" Grant didn't have to be told twice. He opened the throttle and the Pelican shot towards the

atmosphere.

"Rob, we've got trouble!" Dan yelled. The Pelican shuddered again.
"Two Hornets are getting a little too close for comfort!"

"We've got Longswords to the front as well!" Grant piped up.

"What weaponry do we have!?" Drew asked. Rob checked the systems. Luckily, the Innies had set up the Pelican as a support version. The dropship was mounting two missile pods and a rear-facing grenade launcher in addition to the forward 40 mm cannon. Dan instantly leaped for the launcher and began lobbing grenades at the pursuing Hornets, easily bringing them down. Rob meanwhile launched a pair of missiles at the approaching Longswords, blowing them to smithereens.

"Is this the best the Innies have?" Gwen said as the smoking Hornets plunged to the ground far below. Dan shrugged as he continued to scan the sky for hostiles.

"We're about to exit the atmosphere!" Grant yelled from the cockpit, "I'm closing the hatch!" Dan quickly stowed the launcher as the door thrummed shut. The Pelican continued to zoom towards open space, resulting in the engines growing quieter and quieter. Then Rob piped up from the copilot's position.

"I've got the Moon's transponder!" Suddenly, as if on cue the sky was filled with anti-aircraft fire.

"What theâ€¢!" Grant said as the Pelican shuddered violently, "I thought the stations couldn't fire!"

"The codes and console only applied to the MAC guns," Captain Mowsen replied, grabbing hold of one of the seats to steady herself, "The point defense guns are still very operational."

"Great," Grant muttered, "Hang on back there!" The rest of the team scrambled for handholds as Grant threw the massive dropship into a series of maneuvers it was never designed to do. As he did so he aimed the Pelicans nose at the Moon's open hangar bay.

"Are you nuts!" Drew yelled, "You can't slow down to land with all those batteries still on you!"

"I'm on it," Rob said. Within seconds he had launched a wave of fourteen missiles that screamed in and then detonated on the Moon's hull, destroying numerous batteries.

"You're all clear!" Rob yelled to Grant.

"I can see that," Grant replied. Suddenly the hangar doors began to close. However it didn't even faze Grant. With precise skill the Spartan tech expert flew the Pelican through the closing doors with ease and planted the dropship squarely on the hangar bay floor.

"Go, go, go!" Rob yelled as Grant opened the bay doors again. Drew, Gwen, Dan, Carl, and Rob tumbled out of the troop bay just as a missile screeched out from the depths of the hangar, headed straight for the Pelican's cockpit.

"Frag out!" Carl yelled, throwing a grenade right into the missile's path. The grenade detonated, taking the missile with it. About a platoon's worth of Insurrectionist soldiers charged screaming into the hangar, obviously expecting the Spartans to be dazed by the destruction of their ship. Instead they were quickly dispatched by the completely unfazed, slightly angry super-soldiers.

"Grant stay with the captain!" Rob yelled as the squad raced towards the door the Innies had come out of. With military precision the team cleared the hallways around the bay, eventually coming across six or so Moon crew members being guarded by a few Insurrectionist commandos. The SPARTANS dispatched the guards and freed the crew members.

"Where's everybody else?" Rob asked one of them.

"We got separated," the man replied, "The rest of the crew is scattered around the ship." Leaving Carl to watch over the crew members, Gwen and Dan went to find the rest of the prisoners while Rob and Drew went to the bridge. As they approached the door they heard voices.

"They're freeing the prisoners!" one of the voices yelled. It sounded like it was coming over a radio. "We need reinforcements!" Before whoever was on the bridge could reply Drew activated the door controls. When they slid open he fired a spray of bullets that destroyed the radio. Rob meanwhile gunned down the four or five other Insurrectionists scattered around the bridge.

"Get us out of here!" Rob yelled as the few Insurrectionist frigates began moving into position to fire their MAC cannons at the recaptured ship. Drew leaped for the console and quickly typed in a destination before smacking the activation button. The Moon slid into slipspace just as the nearest frigate was preparing to fire.

10. Chapter 9

Sorry this update took so long. I want to give a shout out to whoever reviewed (Doc manager wouldn't let me write the name for some reason) for my first ever review! Thanks and enjoy!

A week after the mission to Tokoran, Rob sat at a desk aboard the Dark of the Moon, looking over the video captured by Coyote Team's helmet cams. The Dark of the Moon was currently being repaired after sustaining heavy damage during the mission, and Rob and the others were scrambling to find things to keep them occupied. As Rob watched through his own eyes as he shot the Innsurrectionist leader, he couldn't help but wonder if he should have kept the Innies alive. He could have been useful. However, in that critical moment Rob's anger at Barrett's cockiness and his absolute fury at the threatening of Captain Mowsen had caused his usually calm demeanor to boil over.

Suddenly Rob was jolted out of his reverie by Drew's voice.

"Hey Rob, come on down to the hangar bay," Drew said, "I've got something to show ya." Rob perked up a bit at that. For the past week Drew had been concealing something under a huge tarp in a corner of

the hangar bay. He hadn't let anyone even come close to it. Rob was in the bay in a matter of minutes, soon joined by the rest of the squad in varying stages of alertness. Dan looked like he'd been run over by a Scorpion tank, Carl was yawning so much he could barely catch his breath, Grant was fiddling with a datachip like he couldn't keep busy enough, and Gwen was out of armor and sweating.

"All right, what's this about?" Gwen said, "I was trying to beat Carl's score on the hand-to-hand combat drills."

"You really wanna see?" Drew asked with a hint of mischief in his voice.

"Yes!" all five other squad members said in unison. Drew turned to the tarp and yanked it away with one pull. Behind it was a Pelican dropship with a snarling coyote head painted on its nose.

"What's this for?" Rob asked.

"Personalization," Drew replied, "I figured that if we have to do more narrow escapes like the one last night, we might as well have a fixed Pelican to you know, identify with."

"Why this one?" Rob asked.

"Duh, it's the one that we commandeered back on Tokoran," Drew replied, "I thought it would be lucky." Rob laughed.

"Makes sense to me," Dan said. As the other members of the squad examined the artwork, Drew pulled Rob aside.

"So, how do you think our first mission went?" Drew asked.

"Considering that our first CO turned out to be a traitor and our ship was nearly blown to kingdom come, I'd say pretty well," Rob replied. Drew chuckled.

"Yeah, me too," Drew said, "So, what's next?"

"Darned if I know," Rob replied, "We can't go anywhere while the _Moon_ 's being repaired. I guess training." So for the next week, Coyote Team trained, and trained, and trained. As they trained, the squad began to see more and more things about their personal combat styles. Dan discovered that he could disarm even the most complicated explosives and make a bomb out of anything. Cal learned that no one in the squad could match his speed and power at close quarters. Drew found that when he didn't want to be seen he was like a shadow, slipping through advanced security measures and taking out enemies without making a sound. Gwen placed herself securely in the position of squad sniper, taking out targets with deadly precision in any conditions. Grant relinquished the sniper spot with a good deal of grumbling, but easily found his niche as tech expert. And Rob became a small-unit tactician of unmatched creativity and skill.

Finally, two weeks after the Tokoran mission, Captain Mowsen called them to the bridge.

"You did a fine job with that hostage situation," she said, "Especially since it wasn't part of the original plan." The squad

nodded together.

"Now we have a new mission," Mowsen said, a slight gleam in her eyes, "ONI wants us for a torch and burn op on Arcadia. An ONI facility is days away from being overrun and we are apparently the closest reinforcements."

"Isn't this kind of a waste of our skills?" Rob asked, "There are a half-dozen other SPARTAN teams that could handle this."

"That's just the thing," Mowsen said, "ONI doesn't want another SPARTAN team to handle it."

"Why not?" Drew asked.

"Darned if I know," Mowsen replied, "We just have to follow our orders and stay out of sight."

"Makes sense," Gwen said.

Within the space of an hour the Dark of the Moon had launched into slipspace. Most of the squad was in cryo, but Drew stayed awake. He was trying to make sense of his weird connections to Gwen. The two SPARTANS were so similar it was scary. The same blue eyes, light brown hair, and accent had that kind of effect. But it just didn't make any sense. If he did have any sort of connection to Gwen, wouldn't he remember it? He pondered the mystery for an entire day before finally giving up and heading for the cryo bay.

The squad awoke several days later just outside of Arcadia's orbit. The skies were mysteriously empty. Captain Mowsen told them they would be landing a day's march from the base to avoid detection. They would be deploying in the same fashion as the previous missions, except without all the extra frills. The deployment went off without a hitch and they were soon on the surface of Arcadia.

"What's our next move?" Dan asked when they had gathered their gear.

"We're going to camp here until nightfall and then move out towards the base," Rob replied.

"Great, more waiting," Drew said, "As if the week in cryo wasn't enough." Rob glared at him but said nothing.

The squad twiddled their thumbs for the rest of the day, anxiously waiting for night to fall. When it finally did, they packed up their gear and began their trip to the ONI facility. When they were about ten miles away daybreak forced them to stop. But Rob wasn't finished yet.

"Drew, I want you and Gwen to reconnoiter the ONI facility," he said. The two super-soldiers looked at each other, disgust showing in their expressions.

"Sure thing Rob," Drew replied before racing to catch up to his "partner".

End

file.